

Telecommuting Drama at Yahoo!!

When Marissa Mayer took the helm of Yahoo as President and CEO after serving as a senior executive for Google, one of her early moves was to ban Yahoo's employees from working at home, even just one or two days per week. The move sparked enormous controversy. Employees who had depended on the job flexibility were outraged. Other critics pointed out that Mayer, a workaholic young mother, who took the top job at Yahoo when she was five months pregnant, took only two weeks maternity leave, and then built a nursery next to her office at her own expense to be closer to her infant son and work even longer hours, showed remarkable insensitivity to most time-strapped working mothers who depend on flexible work schedules to manage their lives without the pay and perks of corporate executives. There are a number of powerful arguments on either side of this issue:

Arguments against telecommuting:

- According to the email announcing the ban at Yahoo: "Some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussions, meeting new people, and impromptu team meetings. Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home. We need to be one Yahoo!, and that starts with physically being together."
- Also: "Being a Yahoo isn't just about your day-to-day job; it is about the interactions and experiences that are only possible in our offices."
- Ironically, many of the Silicon Valley giants that created the technology that make telecommuting possible, do not encourage it at their own workplaces. According to the Los Angeles Times: "The unwritten rule at major Silicon Valley companies is: Just because you can work from anywhere doesn't mean you should. Most Silicon Valley companies such as Google and Facebook have informal policies allowing telecommuting, but they champion the concept of closeness."
- Asked how many workers telecommute, Google's CFO responded, "As few as possible. There is something magical about spending the time together."

Arguments in favor of Telecommuting

- Telecommuting contributes to the community by offering parents the flexibility many need to build and maintain healthy families, which ultimately benefits everyone, especially the next generation.
- Telecommuting benefits the environment by reducing greenhouse emissions in a number of ways: getting commuters off the road, reducing office energy consumption, roadway repairs, urban heating, office construction, business travel and paper usage (as electronic documents replace paper).
- Telecommuting boosts employee productivity – broad-based studies point to a 27% average rise in productivity among telecommuting employees.
- Telecommuting increases employee retention.
- Telecommuting allows workers to find affordable housing (not readily available in Yahoo's immediate vicinity)

You decide: After considering the arguments, do you believe Marissa Mayer made the right decision in banning telecommuting at Yahoo?